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Action the terrorists will understand

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Among the small circle of those who speculate knowledgeably about what the world's hit squads are up to, the story persists of how Israel recently handled the problem of retribution for an act of terror.

The time was mid-morning and the scene was a seedy bar on the Left Bank in Paris. Several people were seated in front of the bartender, imbibing listlessly amid general silence when the door opened and a man of medium build, the lower part of his face wrapped in a scarf, strode quickly to a standing position behind an occupied stool. He tapped firmly upon the back of the man in front of him.

The man turned and his eyes met those of the newcomer, who pronounced his name, fired a gun

directly into his face and walked out the door.

"That's the way," the story concludes, "the Israelis handle retribution for terror and that's the way the Israelis would handle the two men who hijacked that TWA plane."

I've heard that story so often from so many people who are paid to spend their days studying terrorism that I am inclined to believe it, and I thought of it the other day as I heard our secretary of state telling an interviewer that we know the names of the two men who hijacked the airplane and who murdered one of the passengers after first taking care to beat him into screaming pain.

George Shultz is a man of verac-

ity, and I have no doubt that he does know the names of the two terrorists and probably a good deal more about them than what their names are. But George Shultz is also an intelligent man, far too intelligent to suppose that all of us would believe him when he declared, later in the interview, that the United States would expect the Lebanese to bring the two criminals to justice.

That might happen in England or France or Italy — or even in Alice in Wonderland — but it won't happen in Lebanon and George Shultz knows this better than you and I know it. So why did he say it?

Because, as an upholder of the law, he must. When in the 1970s, Frank Church's senate committee revealed the crown jewels of the

Central Intelligence Agency, we passed a law forbidding the CIA to engage in the practice of assassination. As a result, no official of the United States can suggest that ability to name the names of terrorists can serve any other purpose than to bring them before a court of law.

At the time we passed this law, it seemed an essential corrective. The CIA had engaged in assassination attempts against heads of foreign governments, a game at which two can play. John F. Kennedy played it and many suspect that Fidel Castro played it with greater success.

But the law which forbids the CIA from engaging in "extreme prejudice" against anybody, anywhere,

at any time is too restrictive. Are we really prepared to leave the punishment of terrorists to terrorists? If we are, terror will reign. We know the names of these two terrorists. We know what they look like. We ought to be able, over time, to find their hiding places. We have an obligation to hunt them down and to exercise the only punishment we can.

This will mean breaking our own law. So be it. There are times and circumstances when laws must be broken if justice is to be done. This is one of them.

I don't think we need to know when justice has been done. The terrorists will know it. Their protectors and accomplices will know it. Their knowledge will help ensure a safer world.

Tom Braden is a nationally syndicated columnist.